

Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Manchester, New Hampshire
Meeting Minutes
February 20, 2004

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commissioners met after the Merrimack Policy Committee meeting to address time-critical questions brought forward by the Commission's ad hoc Congressional Initiative Committee. Mr. Wayne MacCallum chaired the session. All member agencies were represented except for the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The Commissioners benefited from discussion during the Merrimack Policy Committee meeting highlighting grave concerns about the impact of recently proposed budget cuts at federal Atlantic salmon hatcheries. [Cumulative operating budget cuts at hatcheries in the Connecticut River basin total somewhere around \$100,000. This level of cut in 2004 will have a very large impact on production at the White River National Fish Hatchery in particular, the details of which have yet to be clearly defined.] These fiscal decisions have been based on the fact that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office places the Merrimack and Connecticut River programs as the Region's lowest priority among programs that are all aligned with and supporting the Service's new Strategic Plan.

Mr. MacCallum informed the Commissioners that, as Chair of the Federal Budget and Legislation Committee of the International, he had provided formal comments last week on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget. He requested the CRASC add be continued in 2005 at the same level as requested in 2004 (\$770,000). He noted that the CRASC allocation is not currently in the President's budget. Last year, the effort was focused and legislators were responsive to the message that CRASC presented.

As a consequence, Mr. MacCallum suggested the Commission follow through with the same, consistent funding request (\$770,000) in 2005. There was consensus among the Commissioners on this point.

It was noted that the Commission's legal mandate required the member agencies to cede salmon management authority to CRASC. Thus funding is not for the states or the feds, rather it is for the cooperative effort of CRASC.

There was considerable discussion about the message, especially given concerns about growing operational needs. Ultimately there was consensus for the following message, a sort of combination of the Options 1 & 2:

- (1) CRASC received about 1/3 of the funding needed in 2004;
- (2) Account for what was lost since we received less than needed (mainly - closed WSS);

- (3) Show how we have started to accomplish what we wanted with the new funds (\$250,000);
- (4) Recommend additional funding to continue what we started and to address:
 - (A) Research
 - (B) Operational needs including and increased emphasis on outreach - these will be stated in terms of the outputs associated with the need;

The required research is justified by the Strategic Plan and should address the question of why salmon are not returning as expected. Taking responsibility for accountability is important to the credibility of the overall effort and it shows a critical change in behavior. The CRASC is not doing the same thing again and expecting a different result. [The Technical Committee will review the questions and draft detailed research proposals that can be submitted to legislators upon request.]

The Commissioners agreed to let the Technical Committee review the needs list and formulate a revised list that fits within the requested allocation for 2005. The list should continue to include diversity and outreach. The Technical Committee will finalize this list at the U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee meeting next week in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. The ad hoc Committee was given the latitude to take these numbers, refine the message, and present it as most appropriate.

It was noted that this is no longer about how many salmon return but about how many runs are likely to be lost.

There was some discussion about a movement to develop a regional coalition for Atlantic salmon in New England. Folks in Maine are leading the way. Mr. Duncan McInnes was charged with representing the Commission at the teleconference on February 27. Commissioners were reluctant to commit to such an effort without clarity on the objectives. They were, however, willing to consider the idea. The Maine folks are planning a Congressional Forum on March 9 at 10 am, with or without a coalition effort.

Ms. Rowan encouraged the Commissioners to review and comment on the letter to volunteers so that it can be finalized in time for distribution at the Fry Allocation meeting on March 11. This piece is needed for the grass roots campaign by volunteers. The Connecticut River Salmon Association has agreed to fund the stamped post cards for the Commission.

Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Wayne MacCallum	MAFW
Marvin Moriarty	USFWS
Lee Perry	NHFG
Eric Palmer	VTFW
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Paul Pajak	USFWS
Rick Bennett	USFWS
Duncan McInnes	NHFG
Mark Tisa	MAFW
Jon Greenwood	NHFG
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Doug Smithwood	USFWS
John Warner	USFWS
Larry Lofton	USFWS
Joe McKeon	USFWS
Jim Carroll	CRSA
Dick Bell	CRSA